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## THE FAVORITE NUMBER OF THE ZUÑI

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IN the briefest acquaintance with Zuñi custom and tradition one is struck by the prominence of the numeral four, by its in fact obsessive character. It was on the first day of a recent visit to Zuñi I began to notice it. I had happened on the last of the summer so-called rain dances—the *kokokshi*. In the forelocks of the male figures in the dance were *four* yellow feathers, the bead work on the heel band of their moccasins represented the *four*-armed cross, their dance had to be repeated *four* times, I was told, in *four* plazas of the pueblo. Accompanying the dance or, so to speak, during its interstices, the *koyemshi* fooled about, and those antic figures the Americans call "Mudheads" numbered ten; but in their formal exit from the sacred plaza the *koyemshi* marching two by two divided into two slightly spaced sets, *four* in the first, six in the second. As I learned later, six and ten also play special rôles in Zuñi numeration, but they are, it is fair to say, quite minor rôles. As for eight and twelve, they figure too, but they figure as multiples of four.<sup>1</sup>

It would be tedious, if not impossible, to review the rôle of *four* in all the vast range of Zuñi ceremonial or mythology.<sup>2</sup> Let me give but a cross section of it, as it were, as it appeared to me in connection with the special subjects I was engaged in studying—the crisis ceremonial of Zuñi life, Zuñi beliefs and practises in connection with birth and growth and death.

I begin, remote as it may seem, with a rabbit hunt. But the *quadrennial* sacred rabbit hunt, the hunt with the *koko* or gods, is in an important part a phallic rite. Upon its proper performance and the correct stage-managing of the Chakwena, the Rabbit Huntress, depend the plentifulness of rabbits and of humans. *Four* days before

<sup>1</sup> For example, formerly after killing a Navaho all members of the expedition party were "sacred," i. e., called upon to plant prayer plumes and precluded from sexual intercourse *four* days, but the actual slayer was sacred eight days, *four* days for the slain man, *four* days for himself, and the priest of the Bow was sacred twelve days, *four* days for the slain, *four* for A'hajuta, the elder war god, and *four* for himself.

<sup>2</sup> I may refer *passim* to Cushing, F. H., "Zuñi Creation Myths," XIII. (1891-2), *Ann. Rep. Bur. Amer. Ethnol.*; *Ib.*, "Zuñi Folk Tales," New York, 1901; Stevenson, M. C., "The Zuñi Indians," XXIII. (1901-2), *Ann. Rep. Bur. Amer. Ethn.* For the prominence of the same numeral among the Hopi, see Fewkes, J. W., "The Ceremonial Circuit among the Village Indians," *J. Amer. Folk-Lore*, V. (1892), 39-41.

the time set for the hunt a single rabbit is killed and its blood smeared on the legs of the Chakwena—to be rubbed off in the hunt against the plants she brushes through. For failure to catch a rabbit in the chase, *four* times a man or a “god” is struck, once on each arm and each leg. *Four* times the rabbits are run out from the surrounded areas, *four* times before the hunt turns into a secular and comparatively individualistic activity.

The hunt over, the Chakwena retires to one of the *kewitsine* or sacred club-houses,<sup>3</sup> where for *four* days she lies in on a warmed-up sand-bed as would a woman in her confinement, and where she is taken care of by the woman who expects by this rite of imitative magic to conceive the offspring she desires. At the close of the fourth day the would-be mother receives from the Chakwena the two ears of corn she has carried in the hunt and gives in turn to the Chakwena two other ears—*four* ears of corn figuring in that give and take.

There are other ways to promote conception, but in this connection I need refer only to the conception of twins or rather to the means taken to inhibit it. The woman who eats of the wafer bread her husband brings back with him from his deer hunt will bear twins—since the deer have twins—unless the bread is passed around the rung of her house ladder *four* times.<sup>4</sup>

In a real confinement the period set for it is, as in the case of the mock confinement of the Chakwena, *four* days,<sup>5</sup> or it may be eight days or ten or twelve—whatever the familial practise—and (this is a fact of great interest, I think) any departure from the set practise means that the mother will “dry up,” get thin and die.

Were a hemorrhage to set in through the cord of the infant, it is

<sup>3</sup> There are *six* of them, one devoted to each of the *six* directions, north, south, east, west, the zenith and the nadir. That inspiring student of Zuñi, Frank H. Cushing, added to these directions a seventh, the middle, and seven, he stated, was a sacred number to the Zuñi. (Fewkes, p. 39, n. 2. See too Cushing, “Zuñi Creation Myths,” p. 373.)

<sup>4</sup> *Four* figures in other connections in deer hunting. The night before the hunt eight prayer plume bundles are prepared, four for the *koko*, four for the deer.

<sup>5</sup> The Hopi confinement lasts four days. On the twentieth day, the day of the purifying and naming ceremonial, the “godmother” marks the house walls and floor with *four* parallel lines of meal. *Four* times she touches the head of the mother with an ear of corn dipped each time into yucca suds. The bowl in which the head is washed is thrown off the mesa after it has been waved over the spot of the lustration *four* times. In the corresponding Tewan ceremony after the mother presents the infant to the sun she turns around on the spot *four* times. (Owens, J. G., “Natal Ceremonies of the Hopi Indians,” pp. 168-9, 170, 174. *J. Amer. Ethnol. and Archeology*, II. (1892).) Four days was the confinement period of the Nahuas of Mexico, the numeral being prominent in much of their ceremonialism. (Brinton, D. G., “The Myths of the New World,” p. 90. New York, 1896.)

supposed that some one has been in the room who has been bitten by a dog or a snake. He would have to be found and then to save the life of the child he would have to wave some ashes over the heads of both child and mother—waving them *four* times.

Birthdays are not observed in Zuñi, but a kind of grouping by age there seems to be, for every *four* years an initiation into the *kotikili* is held and boys become eligible for this initiation some time after their first four-years age period, apparently towards the close of their second, *i. e.*, they are not initiated before they are four and they may be initiated before they are eight. In the initiation ceremonial *four* is very prominent. The ceremonial lasts *four* days, days in which the initiate fasts from meat. As he passes between the lines of the twelve *salimobi'ya*, he is whipped<sup>6</sup> by each masked figure *four* times.

But even before the initiation the development of Zuñi children, and, in this case, of girls,<sup>7</sup> as well as boys, is attended to, ceremonially. During the *watempla* dances, purificatory dances of late winter and early spring, the masks known as the *adoshlë* and the *suukë* pay domiciliary visits upon refractory children. Into the disciplinary effect of these terrifying personages we need not go, noting only that *four* times they have to advance upon a house before its adult inmates stop beating upon their pans and drums to pretend to scare them away.

Into Zuñi marriage practises *i. e.*, into a first marriage I have found no numeral obtrusion, but here my observations are by no means final. In the marriage of the widowed the favorite number does occur. Early in the morning after the couple has first slept together the second spouse gives to the remarried one something of value. This object with something belonging to himself or herself the remarried throws in the roadway. Whoever would pick these things up and appropriate them must first kick them *four* times with the left foot and then wave over the things a bit of cedar bark held in the left hand, waving it *four* times. Meanwhile the wedded pair must cut and plant their prayer plumes and stay continent,<sup>8</sup> *four* days for the deceased, and again cutting and planting the plumes, *four* days for themselves.

Immediately after the death of a spouse, the widowed has also planted plumes, again *four* days for the deceased and *four* days for himself or herself. *Four* days it takes the deceased to reach *kothlu-*

<sup>6</sup> Whipping *four* times figures in the restoration of one who has had a bad dream.

<sup>7</sup> Girls are seldom initiated into the *kotikili*. There are in it now *four* women and there were in it in 1902, Mrs. Stevenson reports, *four*, but the occurrence of that ubiquitous number is, in this case, I have been told, a mere fortuity.

<sup>8</sup> *Four* days before every plume planting and *four* days afterwards continence is required. The initiated, *i. e.*, all the men and some of the women, plant plumes every moon and on many other ceremonial occasions.

*wala*,<sup>9</sup> where live below the Sacred Lake the dead.<sup>10</sup> And during these *four* days the house door is left ajar, the mourners may not buy or sell, and the bowl the hair of the dead has been washed in and the implements used in digging the grave all are left out on the house top.

In the cult of the dead *four* also figures. Formerly warriors and still to-day foot racers visit the bank of the river the night before their enterprise to plant plumes in honor of the dead and to bury wafer bread. Prayer and offering made, they move back *four* steps, then sit and listen. *Four* times they thus step backwards and sit and listen.<sup>11</sup>

Mourning usage is ever a very conservative usage, perhaps the most unchanging of all social practises, and so I infer from the prevalence of four in it as well as from its prevalence in all the Zuñi sacerdotal rites and traditions, beds of conservatism too, that the possession of the Zuñi mind by their favorite numeral is very, very ancient.<sup>12</sup> Is it obsolete? I may be asked. A truly satisfactory answer would require prolonged observation. I have noted a few facts however, which suggest at least that the rule of the favorite number is not yet merely historic.

In certain accounts given a well-known ethnographer of Zuñi, accounts reliable Zuñi tell me are erroneous, the numeral four figures quite as prominently as in the unquestioned traditions or practises, *i. e.*, in freshly "made up" stories *four* still figures.<sup>13</sup> I too collected a tradition that shows on its face a comparatively recent origin, a tradition of tribal origins. First to come up into the world, I was told, were the Pimas, the Navaho, the Moki and the peoples of other pueblos, then came the Mexicans, then the "Americans," *fourthly* the Ashiwi or Zuñi.<sup>14</sup> Again in the Zuñi sheep brand, a comparatively late in-

<sup>9</sup> The death trip takes this time among many American tribes. (Brinton, p. 90.)

<sup>10</sup> Zuñi who have represented the *koko* live after death in a hill-side, in a *four*-roomed dwelling. To the Sacred Lake southwest of Zuñi a *quadrennial* ceremonial journey is made.

<sup>11</sup> If they hear sounds of the river roaring or of an owl hooting or of lips smacking or of horse hoofs, it is well. To hear nothing is not well.

<sup>12</sup> Its prominence among the other pueblos would indicate too that it had asserted itself in the matrix pueblo culture, if not, given its prominence likewise in many American tribes, in a still more ancient culture.

<sup>13</sup> An infant's skin is rubbed with ashes to depilate it but no trace of evidence of belief that exfoliation occurs within *four* days could I find. Cp. Stevenson, "The Zuñi Indians," p. 300 n. b. The statement that the forbidden sight of the Sacred Lake will cause visions and death I verified, but the further statement that the death would result in four days (see *Ib.*, p. 356)—this statement was denied. Nor is it believed that the dead live in a house in *kothluwala* containing *four* windows. It were tiresome to continue this list.

<sup>14</sup> This fourth emergence from the Sacred Lake, let me note incidentally, greatly pleased the Sun, because now at least on earth were some to talk his language.

vention, I'm justified in seeing, I think, the use or influence of four. Again, twice during the lifetime of my elderly informant has a Priest of the Bow attempted to establish an innovation<sup>15</sup> in pottery making, relegating and limiting its making to the ceremonial *four* days of the summer solstice,<sup>16</sup> the firing of all the ware to take place on the *fourth* day.

But one striking modern breakdown in the rule of four I did find. The governor of Zuñi, the lieutenant governor and the members of their staffs, their *tenientes* as they are called, no longer make up a board of eight. The three *tenientes* under the governor have been increased first to four then to five, the three under the lieutenant-governor, to four, increases the *practical* needs of government have in recent years required.<sup>17</sup> But the procedure of the board continues, let me add, unchanged. Adjudications are not made by the governor until each *teniente* has in turn made his suggestions and each makes them *four* times.

In conclusion let me give the answers I got when I asked, "Why four?" The first was given me by a Rain priest. "Because," he said, "when the people came up into the world at *kothluwala* they stayed there *four* time periods and as they moved about later they always stayed *four* time periods in each place." The explanation called to mind that offered by another people of early culture for their own sacred number, the number seven. The second answer to my query was given me by a medicine-man of the *Ne'wekwe* Fraternity. "Why four? Because," he said, "the Americans do not always speak the truth. They will give any number. But the Zuñi speak the truth and so they give the true number, the number *four*." Would it not be difficult to get a better illustration of how number may indicate subjective states of mind rather than objective circumstances?

<sup>15</sup> Compare Stevenson, "The Zuñi Indians," p. 150. One of these periods must have occurred while Mrs. Stevenson lived in Zuñi. The custom my informant declared an innovation, an innovation lasting only while its sponsor, the Bow Priest, lived, may have been of course the revival by him of an ancient custom.

<sup>16</sup> During these days none buys or sells or indulges in sexual intercourse. During the first *four* days of the winter solstice ceremonial members of fraternities and the *ashiwani* or rain priests and their households may not buy or sell or eat salt or meat or grease. For *ten* days none may carry out refuse of any kind from a house.

<sup>17</sup> Of interest in this connection is the moot question whether or not these officials are Spanish made. They were—at the close of the seventeenth century—according to Cushing. ("Zuñi Creation Myths," p. 332.)